

Issue Brief

Order Code IB88049

AFGHANISTAN: STATUS, U.S. ROLE, AND IMPLICATIONS OF A SOVIET WITHDRAWAL

Updated April 20, 1988



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AFGHANISTAN: STATUS, U.S. ROLE, AND IMPLICATIONS OF A SOVIET WITHDRAWAL

SUMMARY

The signing of the U.N.-sponsored accord on Afghanistan begins a new phase both of U.S.-Soviet relations and of the Afghan war itself. As part of the accord between Pakistan and the current Afghan government, Moscow has pledged to withdraw its troops within 9 months, beginning on May 15.

Moscow's apparent decision to cut its losses followed a failed effort to break a military and political stalemate. The Afghan resistance grew in military effectiveness and achieved greater battlefield cooperation, while the Afghan army remained relatively ineffective and efforts to co-opt its opponents into a government of national reconciliation under the Afghan communists failed to achieve significant results.

U.S. assistance, channelled through Pakistan, appears to have been an important factor in the increasing effectiveness of the Afghan resistance. Recent U.S. aid to the resistance has been estimated in press reports at over \$600 million per year, with total funding since 1980 approaching \$2 billion.

Various factors are cited to explain the Soviet decision to seek a withdrawal accord. First among these is said to be the military and political stalemate, and the realization that any effort to increase the level of effort would run directly counter to Secretary Gorbachev's campaign for domestic modernization and better relations with the United States, China, and other powers.

The structure of the accord follows the lines of a draft agreement between Pakistan and the Kabul government that evolved from U.N.-sponsored, indirect negotiations at Geneva that began in June 1982. The final settlement includes three bilateral agreements between Afghanistan and Pakistan concerning noninterference in each other's affairs, the return of the refugees, and interrelationships between these elements and a Soviet withdrawal, as well as a document signed by the United States and the U.S.S.R. as international guarantors.

Signing of the accord is likely to provoke a debate in Congress over whether the agreement is in the interest of the United States and its Afghan allies. Although President Reagan and Secretary of State Shultz have affirmed their intent to continue aid to the Afghan resistance so long as the Soviets aid their clients in Kabul, questions remain about how such aid would be effected in view of Pakistan's formal pledge of noninterference in Afghan affairs.

Beyond the accord, major uncertainties exist concerning Afghanistan's future. Some project continued conflict and chaos among various contenders for power, with the collapse of the communist-dominated government followed by widespread fighting and bloodshed among the Afghan resistance groups. Others expect to see the early installation of a consensus government in Kabul representing various factions of the Afghan resistance, but dominated by the Islamic fundamentalists. Still others are not so certain that the Kabul government cannot cling to power with Soviet support.

ISSUE DEFINITION

The signing of the U.N.-sponsored accord on Afghanistan begins a new phase both of U.S.-Soviet relations and of the Afghan war itself. As part of the accord between Pakistan and the current Afghan government, Moscow has pledged to withdraw its troops within 9 months, beginning on May 15. Uncertainties remain over how the accord will be implemented. For instance, how will the accord's provisions for the return of the refugees be implemented so long as the war between the Afghan protagonists continues? How will the provision for "non-interference" between Pakistan and Afghanistan be reconciled with a separate U.S.-Soviet understanding that U.S. aid to the resistance will continue so long as Moscow continues to aid its Afghan clients. Congress, which has strongly backed past U.S. policy to support the Afghan resistance and bolster Pakistan's security, can be expected to monitor closely the implementation of the accord and U.S. policy towards the Afghan resistance.

This brief examines the developments leading up to the Afghan accord, including U.S. and Soviet policy and the impact of broader U.S.-Soviet issues, the issues raised by the accord itself, and scenarios for future developments in the ongoing conflict. More detailed background on the U.N.-sponsored Geneva talks is contained in CRS Report 88-149 F, *Afghanistan Peace Talks: An Annotated Chronology and Analysis of the United Nations-Sponsored Negotiations*.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Current Situation

The accord signed at Geneva on Apr. 14, 1988, provides for a reversal of the process begun when Soviet troops poured down the Termez-Kabul highway in late December 1979. The accord will likely have major ramifications for U.S.-Soviet relations, since it addresses one of the most important causes of a breakdown in relations during the 1980s. Moscow's offer to begin a troop withdrawal by May 15, 2 weeks before the planned Reagan-Gorbachev summit, clearly reflected a desire to create the right climate for progress on strategic arms control and other U.S.-Soviet issues. It appears equally clear that the first priority of the Reagan Administration in the negotiations leading up to the Afghan accord was getting the Soviet troops out, rather than the longer term issue of Afghanistan's future.

The Geneva accord does not of itself provide for an end to the Afghan conflict. The series of bilateral agreements signed by Pakistan and the Kabul authorities provide for mutual noninterference, a mechanism for the return of the refugees from Pakistan to Afghanistan, and linkage between these provisions and a Soviet troop withdrawal. The agreements do not, however, address the fundamental question of ending the struggle between the communist-dominated government in Kabul and the Afghan "mujahidin" (warriors for the faith). The accord brokered by the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General, Diego Cordovez, was signed by the Foreign Minister of the Soviet-backed Afghan government, which

remains for the time being the governing authority. While the agreement may lead to further U.N. efforts to achieve an internal political settlement, few at the moment see much promise of such an agreement.

Status of the Military Conflict

The Soviet decision to withdraw rests heavily on the fact that the war has not gone well for Moscow during the past 18 months. The problem for the Soviets has not been primarily one of losing battles -- though a high number have been lost. The Soviets and their Afghan allies still control Kabul and the main North-South highway, and important cities such as Mazar-e-Sharif in the North and Jallalabad in the Southeast. If anything, they have expanded their local security perimeters in the past year or so. They are not in immediate danger of losing control of contested populated areas such as Herat and Kandahar. They have continued to control important air bases and cantonment areas such as Shindand, in the West, and Kabul airport and Bagram airfield in the capital area.

The basic problem for the Soviets is the one that often plagues armies fighting counterinsurgency wars -- the endless, often tactically pointless and morale-destroying nature of the conflict. During the past year Soviet military efforts have appeared increasingly futile.

During 1985 and 1986 the Soviets carried out extensive and often successful attacks to destroy resistance base camps and interdict supply routes along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. Beginning in late 1986, however, the resistance began to improve its own tactics and coordination. Bolstered by the introduction of the U.S. "Stinger" missiles -- which contributed to an estimated 150-200 aircraft losses in 1987 and severely restricted Soviet tactical air support -- the resistance began overrunning garrisons, cutting vital roads, and turning back Soviet relief columns. Except for mounting major operations to prevent the loss of important strongholds, such as temporarily relieving the besieged garrison at Khost, near the Pakistan border last December, the Soviets generally have adopted a defensive posture in recent months.

Status of the Regime

A major question for the future will be the viability of the current regime. When it came to power in a military-backed coup in April 1978 the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was tiny and deeply divided between rival Parcham ("Banner") and Khalq ("Masses") wings. The Soviet invasion resulted in the eclipse of the more crudely ideological and chauvinistic Khalq faction, which had a base of power in the predominantly Pushtun-speaking officer corps. The Parcham faction headed by Babrak Karmal, which had been more pro-Soviet and "internationalist" in outlook, had a somewhat weaker base of support -- largely among the Tajik minority and urban, detribalized Pushtuns. Infighting among these factions, often bloody, largely paralysed the government for years.

The May 6, 1986, replacement of Babrak Karmal as party Secretary-General by the former head of the Afghan secret police, Lt. Gen. Najibullah, allegedly on grounds of poor health, failed to broaden the

appeal of the regime and created a party backlash among Karmal supporters. Although Karmal's ouster alienated elements in the Parcham wing of the party, it may have helped promote a rapprochement between Najibullah (a Parchami) and the Khalq faction, headed by a fellow Pushtun, Interior Minister Sayed Mohammed Gulabzoi.

Under Najib's rule, the Soviets accelerated efforts to deemphasize the Marxist nature of the PDPA government and create a "popular front." In early 1986 the campaign to widen the appeal of the regime intensified, beginning with a New Year's Day appeal by Najibullah for "national reconciliation." The governing Revolutionary Council was doubled, with the addition of 79 new members, most of whom were alleged to be nonparty figures. In November 1986 a non-party Pushtun was named temporarily as President of the Revolutionary Council, a standing committee of the assembly.

The national reconciliation program failed to gain significant support. A 6-month cease-fire, which was announced to begin Jan. 15, 1987, drew a derisive response from the Afghan resistance. In February Najibullah stated that he was prepared to meet with representatives of exile groups and the resistance on neutral ground. On July 14 he extended the cease-fire and offered specific posts, notably excluding the key internal security and foreign affairs ministries, to opponents. On July 15 the regime finally announced its new draft constitution. In November Najibullah announced the second phase of National Reconciliation, in which he made direct appeals to the seven resistance parties headquartered in Peshawar, Pakistan, promising power sharing and other political rights if they gave up their war against him. He also dropped the tell-tale "Democratic" from the official title of the country, now simply the Republic of Afghanistan, and readopted the "ullah" (of Allah) in his name after a long career as "Najib." The Soviets, meanwhile, dropped their insistence that the PDPA constitute the core of any future coalition government.

The Afghan Resistance

The Afghan resistance forces constitute one of the most determined guerrilla movements in modern times. Several of the groups first went to armed opposition in the mid-1970s in reaction to the leftist tendencies of the government headed by Mohammed Khan Daoud. These groups formed the core of a low-level resistance shortly after the 1978 communist coup. Following the Soviet invasion in 1979, the resistance grew rapidly. It now fields 100,000 or more full and part-time fighters.

The bulk of the resistance is centered among the ethnic Pushtuns of southern Afghanistan, the Tajiks of the east and northeast, and, less importantly, the Uzbeks of the north. All of these groups subscribe to the Sunni branch of Islam. Less well known resistance groups also exist among the Hazara ethnic group of central Afghanistan, who -- like the Iranians -- follow the Shi'a branch of Islam.

The resistance groups are divided by ideology, ethnic makeup, and personal rivalries. Most of them operate in bands and tribal groups led by local commanders, but have ties to one or more larger political parties

with headquarters in Peshawar, in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, and Quetta, in western Pakistan.

The Afghan Resistance Alliance. Seven of the political groups headquartered in Peshawar banded together in May 1985 into the Islamic Alliance of Afghanistan Mujahidin. The Alliance has only slowly begun to surmount deep divisions and rivalries. The Alliance has formed committees such as military affairs, supply, and education to promote better coordination. Decisions are made on the basis of consensus.

A striking fact about the seven parties in the Alliance is that most existed as political groups before the 1978 coup, and have been led by the same men for over a decade. Many of their field commanders, however, are new leaders who command on the basis of battlefield achievements. The main internal divisions are among the "Islamists," who aspire to varying degrees to construct an Afghan political and social system based on Islamic ideology, and the so-called "moderates" or "traditionalists." The latter are also Muslims but seek to restore a traditional political order in which religion is a more private and personal aspect of life.

Ethnic differences and personal rivalries also divide the resistance. The numerically predominant Pushtuns are traditionally divisive, with the result that the largest single party is not a Pushtun Party but rather the Jamaat-e-Islami headed by Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Cairo-educated Islamic scholar, which recruits heavily from the Tajik minority.

Formation of a Provisional Government. In the short term, the resistance leaders are seeking to convert their coalition into a governing authority, perhaps later to be ratified by the convocation of a traditional Loya Jirga (Grand Council of the tribes). On Feb. 25, 1988, on the eve of the Geneva talks, the 7-party alliance proposed the formation of a "transitional government" based in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province capital of Peshawar. The structure of the transitional government would include a 28-member cabinet composed of 14 representatives of the resistance groups, seven refugees and seven "Muslims presently living in Kabul." A 75-member Consultative Council would include two members from each of the 28 provinces, and 19 religious scholars, "technocrats," and intellectuals.

Although the provisional government lineup appeared to reflect a balance among the constituent parties, its formation soon brought about dissension. In March the leader of one of the three "traditionalist" parties, Sibghatullah Mojadidi, resigned from the resistance alliance in protest against the predominance of the fundamentalists in the proposed transitional government. Mojadidi especially objected to the designation of Ahmed Shah, from the Saudi-backed fundamentalist party headed by Abdul Rab Rasul Sayaf, as head of the transitional government. He later retracted his resignation.

Reaction to the Withdrawal Accord. The Afghan resistance groups deeply resent not having been a part of the U.N. negotiating process and have rejected the Geneva accord, vowing to continue the fight until the PDPA government is toppled. In the short term, at least, Soviet strategy towards the Geneva talks has had the effect of increasing the divisiveness

of the resistance. In March the "consensus" chairman of the alliance, Yunis Khalis, a fundamentalist, resigned as a result of a dispute over whether to send observers to the Geneva talks. He was succeeded by the most ideologically militant, fundamentalist leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

The Afghan Refugees

The Soviet invasion of December 1979 raised an existing flow of refugees to Pakistan to a deluge. The government of Pakistan counts 2.9 million registered refugees. Another 1.5 million or more Afghans are thought to be in Iran, including 800,000 or more already there as migrant workers before the Soviet invasion.

Many claim that the numbers of registered refugees in Pakistan are exaggerated, but it is also widely accepted that numerous Afghan refugees have never registered and have filtered into cities such as Peshawar and Karachi, where they have become a visible part of the local economy. The registered refugees are in some 320 camps in areas of Pakistan near the border with Afghanistan. The refugees come from all parts of Afghanistan, but the vast majority are from the Pushtun tribal groups generally located in the southern and eastern part of the country.

The refugee camps are administered by the Pakistan government with the aid and close cooperation of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Program. Various private voluntary organizations assist in the relief work. The refugees are provided with limited supplies of staples such as wheat, edible oil, sugar, tea, and kerosene, which are accounted for in family ration books. The amounts received vary with availability. Over the years the tent cities have turned into the mudwalled villages, with wells, and limited numbers of schools and clinics. In general, the Pakistan government does not permit the refugees to undertake work or run businesses, but many men filter illegally into neighboring cities and towns to find work and supplement the issued rations.

A major concern in Pakistan is that the refugees may not return to Afghanistan even if the Soviets withdraw and peace is restored, let alone if intra-Afghan conflict continues. Some observers feel that the refugees have adapted to life in the camps and the relatively higher economic opportunities in Pakistan. Others distinguish between the majority of the refugees in the camps, who are seen as restless and demoralized, and a minority who have been able to start businesses or find work in the cities. The former are seen by many analysts as eager to return to their homes and farms, should peace be restored, while many of the latter may seek to remain in Pakistan.

U.S. Policy

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, coming on the heels of the Iranian revolution, prompted a major reappraisal of U.S. regional security policy. The invasion was viewed as a potentially important strategic advance by the Soviets to warm waters of the Indian Ocean. Together with the Iranian hostage crisis, the invasion led the Carter Administration to

develop the Rapid Deployment Force (later elevated into CENTCOM) and to rebuild ties to Pakistan that had been ruptured because of U.S. disapproval of Islamabad's efforts to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. The Reagan Administration continued the buildup of U.S. forces in the Arabian Sea/Persian Gulf region, and in October 1981 entered into an agreement with Pakistan on a 6-year, \$3.2 billion program of military and economic aid. Congress facilitated this program by fashioning a waiver to the application of U.S. nuclear nonproliferation legislation and providing appropriations more or less in line with the aid commitment. (For further information on issues in U.S.-Pakistan relations, see CRS Issue Brief 87227, Pakistan's Nuclear Program: Issues in U.S.-Pakistan Relations.)

At least until early 1988, U.S. criteria for ending the conflict were never defined in detail. The United States called for a Soviet withdrawal and for the restoration of Afghanistan's independence and nonalignment, but would not, for instance, comment on its terms for an internal political settlement save for stating that the matter was for "the Afghans" to decide.

The Administration's reticence to discuss the details of its policy objectives appeared to stem from both practical and domestic political considerations. Initially, U.S. policymakers appeared to be pessimistic about the possibilities of obtaining a Soviet withdrawal but wanted to make the Soviets understand the costs of their adventurism. Later, the tenacity of the Afghan resistance raised the prospect of indefinitely delaying a Soviet consolidation, but the disunity of the resistance and its battlefield limitations appeared to make moot the issue of ultimate war objectives.

Few in the Administration apparently saw any real prospect for a breakthrough under the U.N.-sponsored Geneva talks between Pakistan and the Kabul government. The United States was content to consult with Pakistan about the terms of the draft accord, but not to take the lead in crafting a bargaining position. U.S. statements in support of the talks appeared aimed mainly at parrying Soviet propaganda efforts to blame the United States for blocking a settlement.

With the assumption of power by Mikhail Gorbachev, the possibility emerged that the Soviets might actually withdraw as a result of a military stalemate and the failure to promote a viable communist government. Only recently were U.S. policymakers confronted with the need to consider in detail American terms for an Afghan settlement. While the United States was not a direct party to the talks, it increasingly took the lead in coordinating the joint U.S.-Pakistani stance. During the March 1988 round, U.S. representatives held separate discussions with their Soviet counterparts. As of early April 1988 the Administration continued to adhere to its insistence that a cutoff of U.S. and other aid to the resistance be conditioned on a similar Soviet cutoff of aid to the Kabul government, or, conversely, that U.S. aid continue so long as the Soviets were providing aid to their Afghan clients. This stance introduced an issue in the talks that was not addressed in draft treaty language previously accepted by Pakistan, and thus shifted the focus of the talks to the superpower level.

Aid to the Afghan Resistance

A key element of the U.S. response has been collaboration with Pakistan on aid to the Afghan resistance. According to press reports, a low-level aid program involving the United States, China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan began early in 1980. In these early years, the U.S.-organized program reportedly was limited to one that would provide "deniability" to Pakistan. This meant obtaining Soviet-made weapons or copies thereof from Egypt and China or other Eastern bloc weapons from the international black market and limiting the overall size of the program to about \$80 billion. Later, beginning about 1984, the program began to expand dramatically.

Currently, U.S. aid is estimated in press accounts as over \$600 million per year, with total funding since 1980 approaching \$2 billion. According to several sources, Saudi Arabia provides matching funds.

Role of Congress

Congress has played a major role in the rapid expansion of U.S. aid to the resistance in recent years. Reportedly, congressional pressure more than any other factor caused the growth in the level of U.S. aid and the decision to provide U.S. and European weapons systems such as Swiss anti-aircraft guns and U.S. "Stinger" anti-aircraft missiles.

Congressional initiatives also led to the provision of U.S. aid openly rather than through a covert program. Following passage of S.Con. Res. 74 in October 1984, which stated that the United States should "support effectively the people of Afghanistan in their fight for freedom," the Administration reprogrammed several million dollars in funds to establish a cross-border humanitarian program. The program subsequently became directly funded by Congress and grew from \$15 million in FY85 to \$45 million in FY88. Congress has also provided about \$10 million a year to the Department of Defense to transport humanitarian supplies to Pakistan for distribution across the border into Afghanistan. These programs recently have received criticism for alleged inefficiency and the loss of many of the supplies to theft and misappropriation.

In the final phase of the negotiations Congress continued to exercise influence over U.S. policy. A February 1988 "Sense of the Senate" resolution, that passed by 77-0, is widely credited with reinforcing the stance of the Reagan Administration that the United States would continue aid to the Afghan guerrillas as long as Moscow provides aid to the Kabul government.

Soviet Policy in Afghanistan

Background to the Invasion

Russia has traditionally wanted to assert influence over Afghanistan, a bordering country with close ethnic ties to the peoples of Soviet Central Asia. Yet through much of its history, Afghanistan managed to

resist the designs of great powers, remaining neutral and independent. After the 1978 communist coup, the Soviet role in Afghanistan increased rapidly. The two countries signed a friendship treaty that included strong "mutual security" provisions. In addition the Soviet Union expanded an already substantial aid and trade relationship.

Within a year, Soviet satisfaction with developments in Afghanistan turned to concern. The communist takeover had triggered wide-spread resistance, while the communist leaders turned against each other in bloody infighting. The Soviets were apparently alarmed when the more militant and mercurial Hafizullah Amin ousted Muhammad Taraki from the Afghan leadership and began a factional purge. On Dec. 24, 1979, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan, ousted and executed Amin, replacing him with Babrak Karmal of the previously eclipsed "Parcham" wing. Soviet forces took charge of fighting what had by this time become a full-scale war against their occupation.

Gorbachev's Policy

Under Brezhnev's successors Andropov and Chernenko, the Soviet military presence and the level of fighting escalated, but all efforts at a quick military conclusion failed. When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, he too sought to further increase the military pressure on the resistance by qualitative improvement in Soviet forces. While the overall number of Soviet forces in Afghanistan remained at approximately 120,000, the Soviets increased the role of special forces (Spetsnaz) deployed in small units. Gorbachev carried out a much publicized "withdrawal" of six Soviet regiments in 1986, while continuing to expand military facilities and infrastructure throughout the country. Despite this level of commitment, Soviet and Afghan military forces were largely stalemated by 1987.

Gorbachev continued to pour large amounts of money into Afghanistan. Aid deliveries were increased (\$1.6 billion had already been sent between 1979 and 1985), much of it going indirectly to support the Soviet presence. The overall bilateral trade volume more than tripled between the Soviet invasion and 1986 (virtually all of Afghanistan's official foreign trade is now with Warsaw Pact countries). The Soviets also moved to strengthen economic ties between Soviet and Afghan regional and local units, signing cooperation agreements with numerous districts and municipalities.

Politically, the Soviet position in Afghanistan was no more favorable than militarily. The Soviets had invested heavily in transforming Afghanistan's political and social structure, taking control of the government bureaucracy and sending thousands of Afghans to the Soviet Union for education. Yet support for Soviet policies continued to erode, as a steady flow of people defected from the Afghan government and military to the resistance.

The Gorbachev leadership balanced its stepped-up physical presence in Afghanistan with increasing talk of withdrawal. At the 27th Soviet Communist Party Congress in 1986, Gorbachev gave his first detailed and very pessimistic assessment of prospects in Afghanistan, referring to it

as a "bleeding wound." After that time, he and other high-level Soviet spokesmen sounded increasingly certain that Soviet forces would be leaving Afghanistan in the not-too-distant future.

The Soviets gave tentative support to United Nations peace efforts in 1980 but until recently did not seem to be encouraging quick progress. They demanded that U.S. and other outside aid to the Afghan rebels be stopped before a Soviet pullout could begin; sought an unacceptably long time-frame for a withdrawal; and sought to guarantee the continuance of a communist-dominated government by defining their scheme of "national reconciliation" as the only acceptable form of internal accord.

After the summer of 1987, the Soviets showed new flexibility and a greater sense of urgency about reaching a settlement. The Gorbachev leadership moved its key troubleshooter Yuli Vorontsov from arms control talks in Geneva to take charge of negotiations on Afghanistan. The Soviets dropped several obstacles to a peace settlement. At the 27th Communist Party Congress in February 1986, Gorbachev had already alluded to an agreement with Afghanistan on a time table for withdrawing Soviet troops. This time table has since been significantly shortened. In February 1988, Gorbachev announced that Soviet withdrawal could begin by May 15 and be completed within 10 months. Privately, the Soviets also offered to remove one half of their troops within 90 days, in line with a U.S. demand that withdrawal be front-loaded, and to withdraw all Soviet advisors except those tied to the Afghan Defense Ministry, according to press reports quoting official U.S. sources. The Soviets also gave up the demand that a U.S. aid cut-off must precede Soviet withdrawal. In fact, Gorbachev implied that the issue of U.S. aid had already been settled satisfactorily, within the framework of obligations agreed to by the United States in its capacity as a guarantor of a settlement.

The Soviets dropped previous preconditions regarding the future make-up of an Afghan government or the role of the communist party. On Dec. 10, 1987, while at the summit in Washington, Gorbachev signaled his lack of concern about who governed in Kabul after the Soviets left. He reemphasized it in his Feb. 8, 1988, statement on Afghanistan. Soviet commentators subsequently moved a step further, saying that the Soviet Union would refuse to involve itself in any third party negotiations on the future make-up of the government because this was an Afghan internal matter.

In conjunction with these concessions, Soviet spokesmen began to sound more optimistic about the immediate prospects for a settlement. In September 1987 the Soviets suggested that the March 1988 U.N. talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan would be the last round. When those talks stalled, Soviet spokesmen suggested that Soviet troops might begin withdrawing unilaterally but on their own terms and pace. They also began to prepare the groundwork and raise expectations for withdrawal in statements to domestic audiences.

Motivations of Recent Soviet Policy

Recent Soviet actions and statements have led to a debate about Moscow's motivations and objectives. A growing number of analysts believe the public evidence that the Soviet Union decided to cut its losses and get out of Afghanistan, seeking only to save face. While Moscow may still be hoping that its communist clients can maintain control by broadening their support base, these experts do not believe there is much danger that the Soviet Union can achieve, without direct military presence the objectives -- consolidation of a pro-Soviet socialist Afghanistan -- which they could not achieve with their forces. Similarly they find unconvincing the notion that the communist regime can hang on to power once the Soviets are gone, when they could barely do so with massive Soviet military support. They also feel that the Soviet Union has committed its prestige and credibility to a settlement so unequivocally that it is highly unlikely to be conducting a charade.

These experts can point to a number of arguments to support their view. Gorbachev's rise to power has brought a major reassessment of Soviet foreign policy across the board. As part of this review, Soviet leaders have had to reappraise the costs and benefits of their war in Afghanistan. Their unambiguous conclusion, based on numerous authoritative and very explicit statements, is that intervention in Afghanistan was a mistake, that the military, economic, and political costs already outweigh the benefits and are still rising.

Soviet disillusionment is said to be fueled by several factors. First, the situation on the ground in Afghanistan has reached a political and military stalemate that would be difficult to break even with the infusion of larger Soviet resources. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union is sustaining considerable military costs and losses. The Soviets have suffered some 35,000 or more casualties, dead and wounded since 1979. They have lost hundreds of aircraft. Troop morale is reported to be at an all-time low. The Soviet Union has had to pour increasing economic resources into Afghanistan with few positive results from the investment. Support for the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan is very small and dwindling.

Second, under Gorbachev the Soviet Union has shifted policies and priorities to domestic modernization. This is to be attained through economic reform and "glasnost," selective shifting of resources, economic cooperation with the West, and the gain of at least a pause in the arms race and global military competition with the United States. The war in Afghanistan is a direct obstacle to the success of the Gorbachev program. It is a drain on the Soviet Union, making it more difficult for Moscow to shift resources from the military to the civilian economy. It complicates efforts to increase economic cooperation and ease tensions with the West.

Third, the occupation of Afghanistan continues to take a very heavy toll on the Soviet Union's global prestige and influence, especially in the Islamic nations and the Third World. The vast majority of countries have formally condemned the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan at the United Nations. This predicament comes at a time when the Soviet Union is

actively seeking to improve its image as a constructive player on the international scene.

Fourth, Soviet public opposition to the war has grown large and vocal. To some extent the Gorbachev leadership has encouraged this opposition by its decision to give increasing publicity to the war and allowing the media to portray it in an extremely negative light. Because the war is politically so divisive at home, Gorbachev's effort to rally public support behind his strategy may be complicated.

A number of experts take a much more pessimistic or cautious view. They point to the fact that the Soviets have continued military construction and hardening of their defenses in Afghanistan, as well as increasing military deliveries to the Afghan army. In addition they point to the continuing efforts at Soviet-Afghan economic integration (down to the regional and local levels) as strong evidence of an intention to somehow perpetuate their influence even after the withdrawal of their combat forces, assuming the withdrawal is actually carried out.

These experts concede that the Soviets now wish to withdraw troops, but suspect that they may be seeking to achieve through the back door -- subversion, covert action, use of a new generation of Soviet educated Afghans -- what they have been unable to achieve by direct intervention. They may be hoping to manipulate the inevitable discord among competing factions of any new coalition government to maintain influence, in keeping with past Soviet behavior. Some analysts believe it more likely that they have given up the goal of dominating the entire country, at least for the time being, and may now embark on a deliberate strategy of fragmentation, with the aim of absorbing the northern part of Afghanistan.

Evolution of the Geneva Accord

Background to the Talks

From June 1982 through September 1987 Pakistan and Afghanistan conducted 11 rounds of indirect, "proximity" talks at Geneva under the mediation of the special representative of the U.N. Secretary-General. For several years the talks appeared to serve the diplomatic objectives of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the U.S.S.R., but did not offer much hope of a real settlement. Afghanistan kept pressing Pakistan, without success, for direct face-to-face negotiations as a form of recognition and for concluding a bilateral accord on "noninterference" in each other's internal affairs. Pakistan sought, equally unsuccessfully, substantive discussions of a Soviet troop withdrawal. Notwithstanding the impasse, the U.N. negotiator, Diego Cordovez, kept the talks moving by fits and starts towards a comprehensive framework involving four "instruments": non-interference; international guarantees; return of the refugees; and "interrelationships." The fourth instrument connects the other instruments to a Soviet troop withdrawal, and establishes the modalities for monitoring and verifying the Soviet withdrawal, the voluntary return of the refugees to their homes, and the cessation of Pakistani support to the Afghan resistance.

The negotiating draft provided for a neutral and non-aligned Afghanistan, but did not specifically address the issue of Kabul's relationship to Moscow. The agreement is structured as a bilateral accord between Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also provides a role for the Soviet Union and the United States as "guarantors" of non-interference.

Following the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev the talks began to gather some momentum, despite momentary breakdowns. The Afghans long remained adamant, however, about not offering a time frame for a Soviet troop withdrawal until Pakistan agreed to direct negotiations. Pakistan remained equally firm about not agreeing to direct talks, and ultimately Kabul backed down.

Main Issues in the Talks

Time Table for Withdrawal. Following Gorbachev's February 1986 speech to the 27th Party Congress, in which he expressed a desire to withdraw the Soviet forces "in the nearest future," the Afghans finally came forward with a time frame offer. The initial offer was rejected outright by Pakistan, which insisted on a short time frame of 3-4 months. In succeeding sessions, however, the Afghan side progressively lowered the figure until the September 1987 round, where the bargaining stood at 16 months for the Afghans versus 8 months for Pakistan.

Beginning in late 1987 the Soviets publicly offered to reduce the withdrawal time frame to 12 months or less. At the Geneva talks in mid-March 1988, the Afghan side offered a 9-month time frame, thereby meeting Pakistan's most recent figure. The March talks continued into April in disagreement over whether the future make-up of the Afghan government should be part of an Afghan-Pakistani agreement (a demand that Pakistan ultimately retracted).

Issue of Symmetry in the Accord. The last issue to be resolved in reaching an accord was one raised by the United States and one that could only be resolved at the superpower level. This was the issue of whether the accord should be "symmetrical" -- i.e., whether the Soviets could continue to provide aid to the Afghan government even after Pakistan ceased its support of the Afghan resistance. As negotiated by Pakistan, the draft text did not address the issue of Soviet aid to the Afghan government, but the United States insisted that it would not agree to support or guarantee an accord that did not provide for either positive or negative symmetry. The United States argued that if Moscow aided its Kabul allies the United States had to be free to continue support to the mujahidin, but not to aid its allies in Kabul. In the end, the issue was resolved in favor of the U.S. insistence on symmetry via a U.S.-Soviet "understanding," although the actual accord still calls for a cessation of "interference" by Pakistan irrespective of Soviet aid to the Kabul government.

Question of Guarantors. In December 1985, following the Reagan-Gorbachev summit, the United States modified its previously publicly supportive but noncommittal attitude towards the talks. In a letter to the Secretary-General that has since become a focus of criticism by some U.S. supporters of the Afghan resistance, the Reagan

Administration expressed its willingness in principle to be a guarantor of the agreement "provided that the central issue of a Soviet troop withdrawal and its interrelationship to the other instruments were resolved" (New York Times, Dec. 14, 1985).

Issues Regarding the Accord

The Afghanistan accord has already drawn fire from some supporters of the Afghan resistance, and is likely to be a matter of controversy in Congress. Those who favor the accord and a U.S. guarantor role see the Soviet withdrawal as a major victory for U.S. policy even if the conflict goes on for some time. It was the Soviet invasion that brought the United States into the conflict in an area which was otherwise at the periphery of U.S. interests, and the withdrawal will permit the United States and the U.S.S.R. to get on with the business of dealing with concerns such as strategic arms that are more vital matters to the United States. The Soviets have learned a lesson that they are not likely to forget, according to this view, thus reducing the threat of Soviet expansion elsewhere in the Third World.

As for the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, supporters of the accord may argue, the whole episode arose out of an internal Afghan conflict that no outside powers can resolve. Its direct support of the Afghan resistance enabled the United States to counter Soviet influence and affect the course of the conflict, but rejecting a settlement to push for a complete resistance victory would hold other U.S. interests hostage to internal Afghan ethnic, religious, ideological, and personal rivalries. Meanwhile, there is always the risk that other events -- such as a change of power in Pakistan or a rupture of U.S.-Pakistan relations over Islamabad's nuclear policies, or other issues -- could undercut the ability of the United States to sustain the Afghan resistance in the field, leaving Moscow the opportunity for a military victory.

Critics have a similarly long list of arguments against the accord and the U.S. guarantor role. First, perhaps, is skepticism that the Soviets will even live up to their commitment. Some will likely suspect that while the Soviets may begin a withdrawal to get Pakistan to take irrevocable actions to cease support of the resistance, Moscow will in the end find a way to continue to exert its influence over at least the northern part of the country.

Some critics see the Soviets as having sown further discord among the resistance and gaining an end to "outside interference," a long sought goal, while retaining the ability to continue to influence the conflict themselves. Some U.S. supporters of the resistance have already argued that the structure of the accord, with its provision for "noninterference," is such that, regardless of the U.S. assertion of its right to aid the resistance, Pakistan will find it politically impossible to continue its role as the conduit for aid to the resistance. Thus far, President Zia insists that Pakistan can "take the heat."

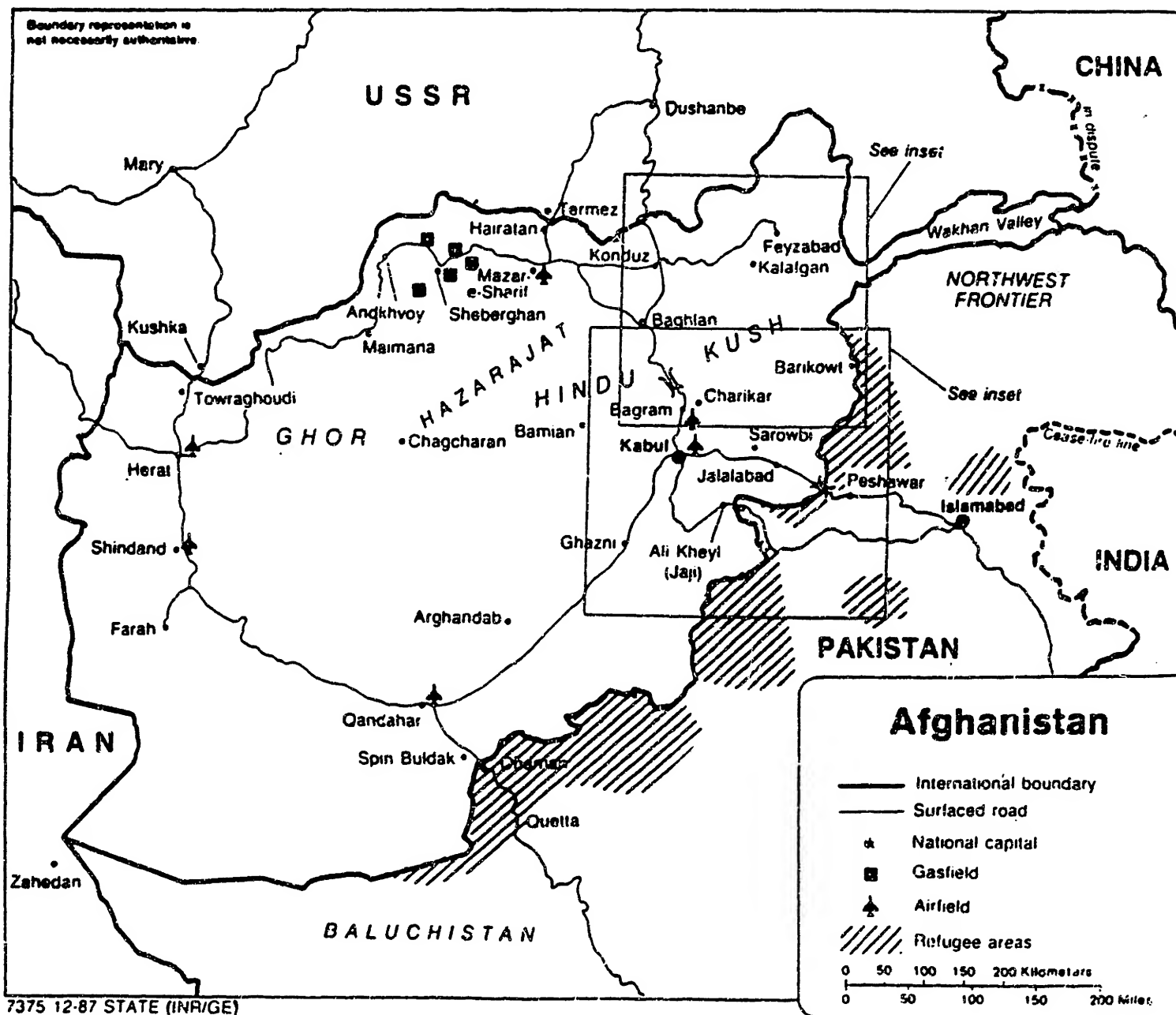
Critics have also questioned the wisdom of agreeing to an accord that by all accounts will not end the conflict. Many in the Administration and

Congress feel a personal commitment to the Afghan resistance and may see an accord that leaves the Kabul government in place as a "sell out" of the mujahidin. Some of these may concede that ultimately the Kabul government will fall, but will argue that in the meantime the resistance will take unnecessary casualties due to an end to its access to modern arms. Others are not so certain that the current government cannot maintain power, especially if Moscow reneges on all or part of its obligations. Meanwhile, faced with an ongoing conflict in their homeland, the refugees will likely remain in Pakistan, where they will be an even more unwelcome part of the Pakistani political scene.

Uncertainty Regarding Afghanistan's Future

As of the signing of the accord, great uncertainty surrounds the future of Afghanistan. Under one scenario, the conflict will continue indefinitely with the current government retaining control in Kabul and the North, if not elsewhere. Under another, the Kabul regime will fall quickly but the Afghan resistance forces will intensify fighting among themselves. Under a third scenario, the Resistance Alliance will be able to put together a weak but viable government based on consensus and an apportionment of political power according to the relative strength of its constituent elements, and will accept those elements of the Afghan bureaucracy and even the military that can show that they served the communists unwillingly. Both of the latter scenarios project the dominance of the Islamist factions, though analysts differ on the actual significance of such an alignment for U.S. interests.

Should the conflict abate, issues will also arise concerning the degree to which the United States should be involved in the process of repatriating refugees and assisting in the reconstruction of the country. At the moment, the only publicized plans relate to the role envisioned for the United Nations under the accord in monitoring the Soviet withdrawal and supervising and assisting the return of the refugees. In theory, the existing U.S. cross-border humanitarian aid program, for which Congress appropriated \$45 million in FY88 funds, could be the basis for a U.S. role in resettlement and reconstruction.



Source: U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Public Affairs. Afghanistan: Eight Years of Soviet Occupation. Special Report No. 173. December 1987. p. 2.